



Today's Education for Tomorrow's Military Leaders

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

Throughout our history, America has been ably defended by citizens willing to protect our freedom. That is doubly true now, when our military consists entirely of volunteers.

This summer, some 325 young Texans are entering a military service academy, starting their training and taking on the responsibility of leading those defending our country.

Americans know our security has always depended on the sacrifice and commitment of free people willing to serve, and the officers from all walks of life who lead them. America's founders recognized this as well.

President Thomas Jefferson signed legislation in 1802 creating the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.—our oldest service academy. The youngest is the U.S. Air Force Academy, this year observing the 50th anniversary of its first graduating class. Three other academies educate officers for the Navy and Marines, the Coast Guard and the Merchant Marines. All have earned outstanding reputations.

On Memorial Day, I had the privilege of hosting the first statewide sendoff for new academy appointees from Texas. These young men and women have been selected to receive an unmatched education, in academics and in leadership. Their service is particularly important as our nation remains steadfast against the real and serious threat of terrorism. They will be among our nation's future leaders.

John Mendez of Amarillo, heading to the Air Force Academy this summer, learned about military service from his father: "Having people in the military around me inspired me to do the same."

Sarah Pritchard of Tyler first developed her interest in a high school Junior Reserve Officer Training Program (ROTC). When she visited the U.S. Naval Academy, she was impressed by the integrity, loyalty, courage, confidence and competence among midshipmen—and their patriotism: "It is something bigger than any one person and it takes a lot of people and a lot of commitment to really make a difference." She starts at Annapolis in July.

Selection for service academy admission is rigorous and competitive. An applicant

must be nominated by a member of Congress, and the process is already under way for the entering class of 2009.

The successful appointees are an impressive group of individuals. Mayor Mike Gonzalez of Kyle, Texas, where the sendoff was held, described them: "At first glance these future military leaders appear like any high school senior. But a short conversation with these young men and women reveals that they are truly something special. They have a disciplined sense of duty to our country that is unbreakable and inspiring."

Guest speaker at our Memorial Day event was retired Army Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, whose early military training came in a college ROTC program. Gen. Sanchez, former commander of coalition ground forces in Iraq, made a big impression with these words:

"The personal transition that begins today will take you from being an average American to a member of the profession of arms. The sacrifices will be many, and the rewards are few. The warrior profession is one of sacrifice, duty, sadness and joy. The demands have been consistent over the ages—great personal sacrifices, respect, competency, discipline, loyalty, commitment to duty, integrity, adherence to high moral and ethical standards, honor and courage."

Some of these students will help lead our military in future decades, and others will serve and move on to careers in civilian life. The caliber of Texans entering America's service academies gives me great confidence that our ability to defend our freedom is being passed to good hands.

Sen. Cornyn serves on the Armed Services, Judiciary and Budget Committees. In addition, he is Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. He serves as the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee's Immigration, Border Security and Refugees subcommittee and the Armed Services Committee's Airland subcommittee. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge. For Sen. Cornyn's previous Texas Times columns: www.cornyn.senate.gov/columnn.